



## High-Definition News

### Going Beyond ‘Best Practices’

By Clark Crowdus

To be successful in sports, you’ve got to have “game” — a great offensive ability. In business, many organizations play only ‘defense.’ And while defense is important, it’s *reactive* and is based on what *competitors are doing*.

One time-honored defensive strategy that many businesses use is to survey the competitive landscape for “best practices.” When you get right down to it, though, employing “best practices” can be a type of cloning – a copy once or twice removed from the original. Not that the use of best practices isn’t important, but it is *defensive in nature* and you are essentially copying someone else’s methods or ideas.

When you transcend best practices and gain a first-mover advantage or category leadership, then you become an ‘offensive’ player, and everyone else must play to your tune. And this, of course, is the most enviable position for a business to be in since innovation drives customer value, which, in turn, drives margin improvement.

Apple is currently in that position with its iPod. It was in that position previously — before Microsoft came along — with its innovative Windows-style user interface. Google broke through with astoundingly fast search capabilities and a simple flash page. Bank of America invented the “accepted anywhere” general purpose credit card, and will soon regain its leadership in the industry with its acquisition of MBNA and its industry-leading customer service and sales practices.

Technological breakthroughs often deliver this kind of market muscle. But not always. Sometimes, it’s a shrewd business move, like Southwest Airlines’ jet fuel hedging program (i.e., effectively guaranteeing below-market prices) for 80% of its jet fuel requirements—and doing so since 2002, long before hedging at such levels became desirable in the airline industry. This was an extension of a corporate culture that embraces the seemingly incongruous values of cost reduction and creativity—and a balance sheet which allows it.

Sometimes, it’s a new technique. In marketing, for example, the branding authority Pierre Rapaille, had a theory that biological imperatives underlie all purchasing decisions, but are masked by rational thought and societal norms. He then found a way to get at the drivers of buying decisions.

These people and companies are setting the standards for business and marketing and they are doing it because they are *moving beyond best practices*. It may be that a company is doing just fine being a ‘fast follower’ or even as what I call a “trailing edge” company that uses number crunching, rather than innovation, as a business strategy. But if you’re interested in category or market leadership, which can snowball into great momentum for an organization, there are some things you can do to change the culture and create an atmosphere where unique solutions can occur. Following are a few ideas:

**Envision a great future** – Vision starts at the top and leaders who are visionaries create great futures to achieve and live up to. Steve Jobs, Richard Branson, Jeff Bezos, and others come to mind. Your company’s culture should begin with vision which pulls all activity in its wake. And whether or not your CEO is on the cover of Fortune magazine, setting the appropriate tone *within your business unit or group* can start this process.

**Create clear and concise value propositions** — Be able to explain the value of your product or service in 20 seconds or less. Be clear about outcomes, and work to manage expectations among your customers, prospects, and your employees.

**Know your customers and prospects better than anyone else** — Devote resources to true research and knowledge of your customer base and potential customers. If you know their real wants and you create a product or service that directly meets those wants, you will be headed for category leadership.

**Hire the cream of the crop and continuously train them** — Finding the best employees in your business category is expensive, time-consuming, and can be frustrating, but it’s well worth the trouble. Some companies, like Google, administer IQ tests to prospective candidates on the premise that anyone who is generally smart will perform above expectations. Google’s stock is currently soaring. Also, continue to develop, educate, and train your smart employees to keep them from getting bored and to keep your company at the leading edge.

**Be the best at service** — To paraphrase a famous saying in business: A great organization is one in which extremely small tasks are done extraordinarily well by nearly everybody, nearly all of the time. The little things *do count*, and if your people are always on the lookout for better ways to serve customers, your culture will become one of continuous improvement.

**Tap your people for ideas** — Harkening back to having the best employees. Unleash their creativity by giving them a voice beyond the unit they work in. Suggestion programs are one avenue, but so are blogs and inter-disciplinary brainstorming sessions across units.

If your organization is moving in these directions, you will “get game” and achieve the kind of marketing momentum that others can only dream of. Achieving clarity about *how to move beyond defensive postures* and driving your strategy forward with a potent offense will increase your company’s ability to set the standards for

your business or product category.

---

***Your feedback is welcomed and should be directed to Clark Crowds,***  
***Principal, High-Definition Consulting Group at [clark@high-def.biz](mailto:clark@high-def.biz).***

---

## **Resources:**

The following resources are recommended by High-Definition Consulting Group:

**Article: Harvard Business School “The Six Forces of Marketing Momentum”**  
<http://hbswk.hbs.edu/item.jhtml?id=3151&t=marketing&noseek=one>

**White Paper: Infotile.com “Competing Through Excitement Beyond Expectation”**  
<http://www.infotile.com/services/techpapers/ctebe.shtml>

**Internet Radio Show: wsRadio.com “Business Best Practices”**  
<http://wsradio.com/internet-talk-radio.cfm/shows/Business-Best-Practices-Radio-Show.html>

**Association: Society for Marketing Professional Services <http://www.smps.org/>**

**Association: Word of Mouth Marketing Association**  
<http://womma.org/index.htm>

---

*High-Definition News* is brought to you by High-Definition Consulting Group, a San Francisco-based marketing and business consulting firm that specializes in identifying and clarifying marketplace opportunities. Our aim is to bring you brief, but thought-provoking content and nuggets of marketing wisdom from our experience and from the experience of others in an easy-to-digest format.

**To contact High-Definition Consulting Group, please do not reply to this message, but use the following contact information:**

**E-mail: [clark@high-def.biz](mailto:clark@high-def.biz)**

**Phone: 1-415-876-4300**

**Fax: 1-415-876-4333**

**33 Lupine Avenue, Ste. 300, San Francisco, CA 94118 USA**

**[www.high-def.biz](http://www.high-def.biz)**

**Visit our archive of back editions of *High-Definition News* at: <http://www.high-def.biz/fyi.htm>**

Copyright © 2005 High-Definition Consulting Group. All rights reserved.

---

**Pay it Forward - If you find material in this or future newsletters of interest to your clients, colleagues, or friends, please forward it to them with our compliments.**